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ABSTRACT

A conceptual approach toward more effective small group functioning is undertaken in this paper to provide a basis from which empirically relevant hypotheses can be drawn and tested. This analysis views actualizing individuals as possessing the unique ability to perceive and utilize the types of behaviors which are conducive to personalizing group interaction. A self-actualizing group member: (1) is perceptive of proper communicative behaviors and able to apply them, (2) is influential in a positive fashion over other group members as a result of his natural mannerisms, (3) has the capacity for identification with others' behaviors, and (4) construes extensive personal meaning to group functioning. It is further suggested that actualizing individuals both build higher levels of interpersonal trust by engaging in supportive behaviors and effectively manage reciprocal exchanges, leading to an atmosphere conducive to frequent self-disclosures. Twenty-three plausible hypotheses are included as suggestions for further research as related to: (1) the self-actualizing group member, (2) interaction and group environment, and (3) exchange of self-disclosure as behavioral determinants within small groups. (Author/TS)

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PERSONALIZING GROUP ENVIRONMENTS: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TOWARD MORE EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP FUNCTIONING

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Abstract

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A conceptual approach toward more effective small group functioning is undertaken. It is suggested that small group research to date does not adequately account for the manner in which self-actualizing group members affect group environments. The intent of this paper is to provide a basis from which empirically relevant hypotheses can be drawn and tested.

The present analysis views actualizing individuals as possessing the unique ability to perceive and utilize the types of behaviors which are conducive to "personalizing" group interaction. Four characteristics are discussed which support this assumption, those being that a self-actualizing group member: 1) Is perceptive of proper communicative behaviors, and able to apply them to his actions; 2) Is influential in a positive fashion over other group members as a result of his natural mannerisms, i.e., actions and reactions to others in group contexts; 3) Has the capacity for identification with other's behaviors; and 4) Construes extensive personal meaning to group functioning, allowing him to successfully lead the group to the attainment of set goals.

It is further suggested that actualizing individuals: 1) Build higher levels of interpersonal trust by engaging in supportive behaviors, lessening the degree of defensive behaviors occurring; and 2) Effectively manage reciprocal exchanges, leading to an atmosphere conducive to frequent self-disclosures, often being mutual and intimate in nature.

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Twenty-three plausible hypotheses are included as suggestions for further research, as related to: 1) The self-actualizing group member; 2) Interaction and group environment; and 3) Reciprocal exchange and self-disclosure as behavioral determinants within small groups.

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PERSONALIZING GROUP ENVIRONMENTS: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TOWARD MORE EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP FUNCTIONING

Introduction

There is becoming an ever increasing need in today's society to effectively interact within small groups. Decision making processes associated with various types of organizations are striving towards quality decisions to be made in the least amount of time. More and more people are attending academic institutions, utilizing the classroom as a workshop for gaining insight into topical areas of concern and interest. And, as in the past, people engage in social activities and find themselves becoming members of a wide variety of small groups in different contexts. The classic example seems to be the common cocktail or dinner party, being somewhat different from so-called "get-togethers" before, during, and after rock concerts which now occur more frequently than ever before. But they are both alike in that each role an individual assumes, (or is perceived as assuming), and each social identity that becomes attached to that person's being, is in some way dependent upon his unique communicative skills in each specific situation. As time passes and greater numbers of people interact with one another, more emphasis is being placed upon such verbal and non-verbal skills, both in dyadic and small group contexts. They become a crucial variable in determining role positions within groups, as well as the value placed upon such positions. And, in turn, are heavily weighted when distinguishing mere acquaintances from close friends, and close friends from those with whom you would like to be most intimate.

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It could be said that there are groups which do not rely as heavily upon the ability of their members to communicate on an interpersonal level while functioning as a unit. I do not deny their existence. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will be referring only to those small groups who could not function if communications with one another did not occur on an interpersonal level.* I will be concerned with any group, (task-oriented or socioemotional), whose maintenance, effectiveness, and/or value to its members is dependent not only upon the individual group member's ability to relate and interrelate with others in his group, but the atmosphere created within the group as a result of the combined actions of those members which define its existence.

Viewing small groups in this light is far from being new when studying the types of interactions occurring between group members. (See Stogdill, 1959; Cartwright and Zander, 1968; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Bormann, 1969; Patton and Giffin, 1974.) However, several interesting questions arise as attention is focused upon the individual group member. Those questions are: Is there, in fact, a certain type of individual (hereafter referred to as the self-actualizing group member) who is better able to perceive and utilize the types of behaviors which are conducive to personalizing reciprocal exchanges within group environments; and, if so, can such an

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*A group is a number of people in interaction with one another, and it is this interaction process that distinguishes the group from an aggregate. (Bonner, 1959, p.4)

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individual help to build higher levels of interpersonal trust by lessening the degree of defensive behaviors occurring, increasing mutual self-disclosures as a result?

In addressing these questions and the implications they may have, the self-actualizing group member will be discussed as related to present theoretical approaches to small group behavior, as well as to research findings on specific attributes possessed by actualizing individuals. Such individuals will be further viewed in terms of those perceptions and behaviors which lead to personalizing group environments, increasing the probability that group efficiency will be maximized in return. These will provide a basis for later portions of the paper, which suggest new directions for future research which might otherwise be ignored.

The Self-Actualizing Group Member

Present day theoretical approaches to the study of small groups are numerous. Each theory, in its own way, adds to our understanding of what group behavior is all about. (See Shaw and Costanzo, 1970; Burgoon, Heston, & McCroskey, 1974; Rosenfield, 1973.) Approaches to small group functioning may be broad in scope, i.e., a theory accounting for overall group performance and behavior such as field theory, psychoanalytic theory, etc., or relatively narrow in their focus, dealing with specific phenomenon such as leadership formation or conformity behavior. (Shaw, 1971, pp. 22.)

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Group syntality theory, (Cattell, 1948), a theory of group achievement, (Stogdill, 1959), exchange theory, (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959), and the FIRO theory, (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation), formulated by Schutz in 1955, are all well known theories which account for group functionings from different perspectives. And, on a more specific level of focus, the definition of leadership and the many variables associated with assuming such a role in small groups, has been approached by Carter (1953), Cattell (1951), Stogdill (1948), and Lewin and his associates (lewin, Lippitt, and White, 1939; Lippit and White, 1943), to name only a few of the many scholars which have attempted to more clearly define this area of study.

However, given these theoretical approaches and those similar to them in focus, be they specific or general in nature, I find it interesting that few if any theories account for small group functioning as a result of the perceptions and behaviors of self-actualizing group members. Individuals are discussed as being crucial in affecting other group members, as well as in helping to create group environments, yet are not viewed according to the specific manners by which different types of individuals go about acting and interacting within small groups of people. It would seem that if such individuals do have the ability to consistently affect group environments in a positive fashion, more so than the average or above average group member, they should not be overlooked as a major variable in small group research.

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Self-actualization is far from being a new concept to those interested in the study of human behavior. (See Combs et al., 1962.) As proposed by Maslow (1954, 1962), a self-actualizing individual is one whos is fully-functioning, thus living a more enriched life than the average person. Such an individual is unique due to his strong "urge to grow", "will to health", and "quest for one's identity", (Maslow, 1962b, p.35.) As measured by Shostrom (1965), self-actualizing people were generally found to have the following characteristics:

A. They seemed able to liberate themselves from social pressures, expectations, and goals;

B. They are able to live in the here and now more fully, integrating the past and the future to the present in meaningful continuity. They are less burdened by guilts, regrets, and resentments from the past than is the non-self-actualizing person, and have aspirations which are also tied meaningfully to present working goals. They have faith in the future without rigid or idealistic goals;

C. The self-actualizing person could be characterized as having more of an autonomous, self-supportive, or "being" orientation. He is sensitive to people's approval, affection, and good will, and has discovered a mode of living which gives him confidence in himself; and

D. Such an individual is synergic, i.e., the distinction between self and others is transcended when individuality is apprciated in self and others.

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In small group contexts, as related to those personality characteristics explored by Shostrom (1965), it would seem to follow that self-actualizing group members would posses the ability to accurately assess the behavioral characteristics of others in the group. To be consistent in judging others implies that one must first be consistent in dealing with himself. This involves effectively analyzing and dealing with one's self on a day to day basis, in hopes of becoming better able to relate to others in different situational contexts. To actualize one's potentials while constantly growing and developing as a human being, an individual must come to grips with the extent to which he has this capacity for identification with others' behaviors. As a small group member, he in most cases cannot afford to be insensitive to the way other group members act and react to him as a person. For it is through the actions and reactions of others that he is able to identify his own behaviors, be they good or bad. This awareness allows him to better relate to those who communicate in a different manner, functioning at various levels of effectiveness in expressing their thoughts and ideas to others in an understandable fashion. Thus, a person's interpersonal skills are of utmost importance if he wishes to reach yet higher states of self-actualization, and small groups provide an excellent arena for becoming aware of one's strengths and weaknesses while communicating with others.

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The wider a perceptual field a person can create and maintain for himself in terms of human behavior, and the more accessible these learnings are to him when interacting within small groups of people, the more aware will he be of how he is coming across to other members of the group as compared to how he would like his behaviors and intentions perceived. As cited by Combs (1962, p.56), in discussing the role of self-actualizing people in educational settings, often involving interaction within small groups of people, "Truly adequate persons possess perceptual fields maximally open to experience. That is to say, their perceptual fields are capable of change and adjustment in such a fashion as to make fullest possible use of their experience."

However, the key factor is how the information which is perceived within the group is used for adaptive purposes. For example, it is fairly safe to assume that behavior is a function of perceptions. And, as I have stated, the wider the range of these perceptions, the more likely will one elicit effective communicative behavior within a small group. Yet what cannot be overlooked is the fact that the degree to which any perception will affect an individual, depends upon its personal meaning for that individual. The self-actualizing person not only seeks out more information from the group, but reflects upon it to learn more about himself and others. It becomes in many ways self-fulfilling that he construes more personal meanings to how the group is functioning as a whole, and how he is functioning

as a member within it, because the more he actually knows about the dynamics of interaction, the more it affects his behavior. The greater his commitment, and the greater his concern, the more he creates the opportunity to discuss with himself the fact that changes are meant to be made if his thoughts and/or behaviors are in any way different than what he would like them to be. If, in the process, he is called upon to express his reasoning for making a decision or not agreeing with another's viewpoint, he would also be better able to accurately judge what other members of the group are like, weigh the situation at hand, and adjust his communicative behaviors according to the best means of making himself understood to the group as a whole...as well as to specific members within it. Possessing such an ability, however, can lead to negative consequences. If he is viewed as being quite persuasive and adaptable by other group members, he may likewise be perceived as being very manipulative and/or overly dominant as interaction occurs between himself and others. It is crucial, then, for such an individual to project his intentions in a sincere manner so as not to be rejected by the group.

These types of personal attributes may very well be a strong indicator of why these individuals would often be most likely to achieve high status positions within groups. As viewed by Carter, (1953), a leader, for example, may be defined as a person who is the focus of group behaviors. In addition, a leader is likely to: receive more communications than others; have more influence upon the group's decisions; and lead the group toward its goals. As further defined by Shaw (1971, p.269), a leader is viewed as

"...that group member who exerts positive influence over other group members, or as that member who exerts more positive influence over others than they exert over him." Assuming roles which are generally dominant in nature implies that one would not be forced to rely on the behaviors of others (external stimuli) in the group to constantly determine his thoughts and actions. In other words, as viewed by Lindzey and Aronson (eds.) (1969, p.87), he would "...develop according to his intrinsic growth tendencies, rather than be molded by the outer world."

Approaching group settings as meaningful behavioral experiences becomes part of an actualizing member's personality, affecting the way such an individual acts as a group member. As a result, new insights are gained into additional skills and concepts which increase his effectiveness as a communicator, causing him to partially overlook meetings or "get-togethers" which may seem dull and laborious, for those which are more stimulating. Yet even dull and laborious experiences are of value to him because they provide examples of what groups often are like, as compared to what they may become in the future, or to what other groups may consistently be. If bothered by a group in which communication channels are not open, creating barriers which form blockades to task completion and knowing of the self and others, it only reinforces his appreciation of what effective groups can accomplish, and what they have to offer each of their members in terms of rewards...himself included.

Yet such doubts and fears can become eliminated by focusing upon and dealing with interpersonal and intergroup relations,

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which are often at the heart of problems which may arise, as well as further problems resulting from unsuccessful attempts to solve them. Uncertain and ambiguous attitudes toward others can be kept at a minimum, and new ways of relating with others can be discovered. This ability can define the level of awareness of self as a causal agent, and provide an objective measure of self-development. Utilizing one's interactive processes...perceiving, integrating, adapting and responding...can build self-confidence, generating higher levels of self-actualization en route to producing more efficient individuals as group members, and more effective groups as a result of their combined efforts.

These viewpoints seem to correlate with various points that I have suggested thus far, those being that a self-actualizing group member: 1) is perceptive of proper communicative behaviors and able to apply them to his actions; 2) is influential over group members as a result of his natural mannerisms; i.e., actions and reactions to others in group contexts; 3) has the capacity for identification with others' behaviors, and 4) construes extensive personal meaning to group functioning, allowing him to successfully lead the group to the attainment of set goals in a variety of situations. In short, these attributes, if employed properly, can lead to personalized group environments, affecting the group as a whole, and specific members within it in a positive manner.

In a study performed by Roland Frye (1967), the degree of an individual's attraction to a group, and the level of self-esteem which he could attain within it, were dependent upon the group's effectiveness in completing tasks in a satisfactory manner. He

also found that group effectiveness was determined by the type of feedback (interaction) which occurred in decision making, problem solving and goal achievement. Similar results were obtained by Dyer (1972) and Smith (1972).

Relevant to these findings, an interesting question arises: What effect does the manner by which feedback is utilized have on group functioning, and how is this related to the atmosphere under which interaction occurs?

Interaction and Group Environment

I have suggested that an individual will function better within a small group if he can adequately deal with himself, thus being better able to perceive and react to others' behaviors. I also stressed the importance of applying such information to one's self, for personal meaning establishes the value of all behaviors which one perceives. These are only two of the many aspects associated with actualizing group members, yet both are of value in processing feedback in small group settings. However, the utilization of feedback can become more specific in its implications; i.e., how does one react to others' ideas and criticisms, and how does this affect subsequent interactions within the group? Before addressing these two questions, let me provide some examples of various types of related situations which could occur in small groups. Consider a group composed of Harry, Tom, Mary, Jack and Sue...

A. Tom expresses an idea to his group which Mary and Jack do not agree with, but neither expresses their resentment in return because they know how upset Tom becomes when people disagree

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with him.

B. Sue does not understand an issue which is being discussed, and addresses the group with several questions about it. Harry speaks up and, in a subtle manner, scolds her for not raising her questions earlier since the group had been discussing the issue for some time. Five minutes later Harry asks a question similar to the ones he had scolded Sue for asking.

C. Tom does not like Harry, and often focuses on trivial things Harry says in discussion to start an argument, or to make Harry look bad in front of the other group members.

D. Rather than argue with Sue, Mary finds herself outwardly agreeing with things Sue says that she personally does not agree with.

E. After a decision has been made, Jack suggests that the group spend time discussing implications such a decision might have on each member of the group. Everyone agrees.

F. Harry asks Tom to be more polite during discussions between group members. Tom responds in a harsh voice and says that he is polite, and that Harry is being impolite by making such an accusation. The group agrees with Harry.

Naturally, these are only a few of literally millions of situations a small group may experience. But they all deal with at least one of two concepts: supportiveness and its sub-concept defensiveness, and/or interpersonal trust. To better relate these examples to the concepts listed, and specify the variables associated with each concept, I will refer to an article written by Jack Gibb (1961), entitled "Defensive Communication," and a study conducted by Glen Mellinger (1956), "Interpersonal Trust as a Factor

in Communications."

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As with the concept of self-actualization, defensive communication as viewed by Gibb, and interpersonal trust as approached by Mellinger, are not new in analyzing the processes of interaction between human beings. Yet as the two are integrated and applied to the small group arena, they provide an interesting perspective from which the behaviors of actualizing group members can be better foreseen. It is my belief, as stated earlier, that such individuals are prone to creating environments in which defenses are reduced (employing "supportive" variables), leading to higher levels of interpersonal trust and group efficiency.

Supportiveness and Defensive Communication

Before isolating and conceptualizing those variables employed by Mellinger, it will be helpful to view the concept of supportiveness and its associated variables. Doing so allows for even a stronger base from which the importance of interpersonal trust can be perceived.

Gibb views communication as a people process rather than a language process. He believes that the higher the quality of interpersonal or intergroup relationships, the more quality will communication have associated with such relationships. And, one means of adding to quality communication is by reducing the degree of defensive behaviors occurring. (He defines defensiveness as "...that behavior which occurs when an individual perceives or anticipates threat in a group.")

Given this approach, it could be asked: How does this relate

to the concept of interpersonal trust, and distortion levels of communication between individuals? Gibb states that "Not only do defensive communicators send off multiple value, motive, and affect cues, but also defensive recipients distort what they receive... Specifically, distortions become greater when defensive states existed in the groups." Thus, it could be assumed that in most cases the less defensive the behavior, the less distortion will there be in a communicative atmosphere. With defenses and distortion at a low level, the greater will be the probability that high levels of trust will be achieved and maintained. Gibb calls this a "supportive" climate, and further states, "As defenses are reduced, the receivers become better able to concentrate upon the structure, the content, and the cognitive meanings of the message."

Supportive climates can be further clarified by listing those behavioral characteristics (variables) of supportive and defensive climates in small groups as defined by Gibb (1961).

Defensive Climates	Supportive Climates
1. Evaluation	1. Description
2. Control	2. Problem Orientation
3. Strategy	3. Spontaneity
4. Neutrality	4. Empathy
5. Superiority	5. Equality
6. Certainty	6. Provisionalism

Defensive Climate

1. Evaluation. Refers to message sending which leads the receiver to believe that his worth as a person is being subjected to good or bad judgments.
2. Control. Denotes perceived efforts to manipulate, with the

frequent assumption by the change agent that the person to be altered is inadequate.

3. Strategy. Refers especially to gimmicks or tricks...for example, efforts to delude a group member into thinking that he is participating in significant decision making when in fact, the leader and his lieutenant are making the decisions.
4. Neutrality. Should not be taken to mean objectivity, but rather a cold, hard, impersonal climate, indicating that there is no real concern for the other person's welfare.
5. Superiority. Denotes behavior which causes a message receiver (especially a group member with lower status) to perceive that the other person is talking down to him, from a position of self-appointed eminence, of intelligence, experience, power, etc.
6. Certainty. Might roughly be translated as dogmatism... sometimes manifested as "preaching" or "knowing it all" attitudes.

Supportive Climate

1. Description. Speech acts which the listener perceives as genuine requests for information. Specifically, presentations of feelings which do not ask or imply that the receiver change behavior or attitude are minimally defense producing.
2. Problem Orientation. When the sender communicates a desire to collaborate in defining a mutual problem and in seeking its solution, rather than imposing a predetermined solution, attitude or method.
3. Spontaneity. Perception-free behavior, perceived as involving

uncomplicated motivations, and being straightforward and honest. Does not involve the utilization of gimmicks and/or tricks.

4. Empathy. When a speaker identifies himself with the listener's problems (or vice-versa), shares his feelings, and accepts his emotional reactions at face value.
5. Equality. When the sender is perceived as willing to enter into participative planning with mutual trust and respect. Differences in talent, ability, worth, appearance, status and power often exist, but the low defense communicator seems to attach little importance to these differences.
6. Provisionalism. Denotes willingness to investigate issues rather than take sides on them, to be problem solving rather than debating, and to be willing to explore thoughts and ideas. This tends to communicate that the listener may have some control over the shared quest or the investigation of the ideas.

Interpersonal Trust as a Factor in Communication

The importance of interpersonal trust as a factor in communicative events should never be overlooked or underestimated. As Mellinger very simply states in his introduction, "...an individual is likely to distort his own attitudes in communicating them to people he distrusts." Applying interpersonal trust to the types of small group settings which are being discussed at present, where interaction is of utmost importance, there exists even a stronger need for effective communication without distortion. The abundance of ideas to be transmitted, in relation to the way in

which ideas are transmitted and received, lies at the heart and success of all small group structures. As Mellinger further states, "...a primary goal of communication with a distrusted person becomes the reduction of one's anxiety, rather than the accurate transmission of ideas."

Given only a sample of the importance of interpersonal trust in small group contexts, it can be seen that a definite relationship exists between the concepts of supportiveness and interpersonal trust. Very simply, the degree of trust present usually depends upon the degree of supportive behavior exercised by those communicating. And the lack of supportive behavior in various degrees usually implies the greater amount of defensive behavior occurring.

In clarifying levels of trust between individuals, Mellinger specifies three variables: compliance, evasion, and aggression. These variables are often used by individuals while communicating with those whom they distrust. They are defined as follows:

Compliance. When an individual tries to put himself in a more favorable light with another, minimizing actual disagreement.

Evasion. When an individual is vague regarding his attitudes about the issue being discussed.

Aggression. When an individual expresses resentment toward another, exaggerating disagreement.

Employing either of these variables, or combinations of the three, would result in a distorted message from the source. This would then cause the perceptions of the receiver to be altered accordingly.

As a measuring device, determining the level of trust present

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between individuals communicating with one another, or within groups during interaction, Mellinger uses the term perceptual displacement. It not only indicates the difference between how an individual feels you are communicating to him, and what degree of distortion is coming from you, but whether the inaccuracy takes the form of exaggerating or minimizing attitudes. (Relating to the variables tapped by Mellinger, attitudes are usually exaggerated by the use of aggression and/or evasion, and minimized by employing compliance and/or evasion. However, because of the vagueness associated with the evasion tactic, it is difficult to determine whether attitudes are exaggerated or minimized.)

To further clarify the effectiveness of a supportive over a defensive climate, and how this helps to determine levels of interpersonal trust, let me provide an example. Suppose you are a faculty member at a university, and your department chairperson calls a special meeting. At this meeting, the chairperson begins discussing relevant matters with you and your colleagues concerning a policy decision that needs to be made, that would affect every member in the group. For some reason, he behaves in a manner that makes everyone feel that no matter what they say, he will not take their viewpoints into consideration because he is more acquainted with internal university "politics" than anyone else, thus knowing what decision will be best for the department.

Because of his dealings with university-related matters, it is likely that he would be more aware of how to deal with such policies. However, in this situation it is quite clear that the faculty members would most probably express resentment toward the

chairperson, possibly exaggerating disagreement on various issues if the chairperson continued to act in the same manner (aggression). Because he failed to create an atmosphere of trust that the faculty members could feel secure within, he would be receiving distorted messages from them, affecting the quality of understanding and communication needed for such group meetings to be successful. In this case, building trust would require that the chairperson make it clear to the faculty that he wants the new policy to be discussed openly, so he can better empathize with any problems the faculty may be having in understanding the policy and how they will be affected if it is adopted. This would enable them to work together in attempting to reach an acceptable decision. If he was successful in projecting these intentions, the faculty would be much less likely to minimize actual disagreement (compliance), be vague in expressing their attitudes about the issues being discussed (evasion), or exaggerate disagreement because they resented him for the way he conducted the meeting (aggression).

Figure 1, on the following page, clearly represents the manner in which the concepts of supportiveness and interpersonal trust, and the variables associated with each interrelate. The quality of communication occurring, and the types of roles assumed, are directly related to the aforementioned aspects suggested as being associated with the self-actualizing group member.

Reciprocal Exchange and Mutual Self-Disclosure: Two Behavioral Determinants Within Small Groups

As I have shown, the concepts of supportiveness and interpersonal

Chart Depicting the COMBINED Interrelatedness (⟷) of Two Specific Behavioral Correlates (Concepts-Variables) and Four Roles Possibly Assumed Within Small Groups

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The quality of communication between types of individuals within small groups: ⟷	Is determined by the communicative climate within which groups interact: ⟷	Affecting the degree to which one distrusts another:
(possible roles assumed)	(supportiveness)	(interpersonal trust)
		Employing the Variables:
	Supportive	Defensive
1. Leader	1. Description	1. Evaluation
2. Lieutenant	2. Problem orientation	2. Control
3. Tension-Reliever	3. Spontaneity	3. Strategy
4. Task-Orientor	4. Empathy	4. Neutrality
	5. Equality	5. Superiority
	6. Provisionalism	6. Certainty

1. Compliance
2. Evasion
3. Aggression

FIGURE 1

trust undoubtedly have strong effects on interactions within a small group. The examples I provided earlier support this assumption. More specifically, such interactions could be viewed as reciprocal exchange between members of the group.

It seems very curious to me that regardless of the situation you are in involving yourself and varying numbers of other individuals, be it due to interpersonal attraction, circumstances, choice or a plethora of other possible variables, there exists an underlying human need for some form of reciprocal exchange. Being highly contextual, each group setting is thus unique in its own way, depending upon the degree to which the variables associated with the two aforementioned concepts are employed. As these concept-variables are behavioral determinants within small groups, the importance of the presence of actualizing group members is clearly seen. In short, their actions may often regulate not only whether interaction is reciprocal or a process of mutual self-disclosure, but the manner in which such interaction occurs. (For the purpose of this paper, I will be defining mutual self-disclosure according to Savicki, 1972: the process by which people gradually develop psychological closeness.)

In other words, insight is required to manage reciprocal exchanges in a fashion that leads to mutual self-disclosure. It is also needed after disclosure occurs, to insure that it is accepted and reciprocated properly, leading to more frequent and intimate disclosures in return.

Although the purpose(s) of many groups do not lend themselves toward psychological closeness, I would like to make several

distinctions and pinpoint various implications between reciprocal exchange and mutual self-disclosure as related to these two concepts. To do so, I will first refer to a variety of studies which clarify the effect of either on both.

Research Background

The dominant figure in researching the effects of self-disclosure and reciprocity on human behavior is Sidney Jourard. The study he performed in 1959, "Self-Disclosure and Other Cathexis," rendered results which became hypotheses for further studies to be initiated thereafter. He found that individuals disclosed most to those who most confided in them, which further implied that the most intimate of dyadic relationships were established by means of reciprocal intimacy. Two further hypotheses were confirmed: 1) Disclosure became a reciprocal type of behavior which proceeded to a level of intimacy agreeable to both parties and then stopped; and 2) People disclose more to those they know, as compared to those they like. An interesting, almost basic aspect associated with this study was that if people wish to become known and understood, they must disclose of themselves. This assumes circular reciprocity in terms of meaningful feedback, both given and received. Related to this feedback, the importance of non-distorted communication is crucial, being associated with higher levels of trust with a minimum of defensive behaviors occurring.

The effects of the expectations of individuals' disclosure levels in a small group context seems to be an important area to be considered. For example, place yourself in a small group

composed of six members. If one member unexpectedly discloses some information which is perceived by the others to be very personal in nature, you and the remaining four members will more than likely feel pressured to reciprocate on an equal level of intimacy. The types of norms present within the group will very often govern the kinds of responses which will occur. Yet regardless of the type of interaction which then takes place, be it supportive or defensive, the point to be made is directly related to a hypothesis confirmed by Jourard (1964) in his book, The Transparent Self: Violation of reciprocity through too little or too much disclosure indicates varying degrees of probable disturbance.

In a study focusing upon the outcomes of nonreciprocal self-disclosure strategies, Savicki (1972) hypothesized that extreme non-reciprocal styles of self-disclosure cause another to limit his own disclosing behavior. The hypothesis was unexpectedly disconfirmed. The major reason he suggested as accounting for the results was that overdisclosure produces withdrawal only when combined with perceived and marked differences between one's self and the discloser. This seems very relevant to one's listening behaviors and disclosing manners within small groups, involving different types of individuals eliciting varying degrees of defensive behaviors.

As mentioned previously, the level of interpersonal trust present within groups definitely affects the type and degree of exchange which occurs between individuals...even to the point of determining whether the exchange will be merely reciprocal or a process of mutual self-disclosure. Johnson and Noonan (1972)

found that higher levels of trust are attained when one accepts another's self-disclosures and responds to him by self-disclosing on equal or higher levels of intimacy in a reciprocal manner.

Reciprocal Tensions and Intimate Exchange

Anyone who has been a member of a small group has at sometime or another experienced reciprocal tensions. These range from questions of appearance, "How do I look?" and "How does he or she think I look?" to questions of behavior, "Are my actions acceptable to other members of the group?" Also included could be discussing personal matters, or disagreeing on certain issues. However, individuals seem to be more aware of what they think might happen if reciprocity breaks down than of the role it plays in their interaction with others. Very simply, as persons strive to learn of each other and/or achieve tasks in groups, they must reciprocate. If this is not handled in a manner conducive to building high trust levels and being generally supportive of one another, a manner which I have suggested is employed by self-actualizing group members, behaviors and effectiveness, both on an individual and group level, will be severely affected. Reciprocity could be considered to be the most basic of all interpersonal needs. Thus, it becomes one of the most crucial aspects determining group survival...it is a norm which is present within all group structures.

Suppose a member of the group supported an idea you presented, and because of his credibility ranking within the group, your idea was accepted. Without his help, your idea may have failed. It is as though he has rendered a duty to you, and you have a right to

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acknowledge his effort by expressing your appreciation. You feel a need to reciprocate his gesture. This type of exchange helps to define coalition formations and power structures within groups, being specifically related to leadership emergence and formation. The manner by which you show your gratitude, as well as how it is accepted, will influence the reciprocity which occurs thereafter, and in part, the meaning that becomes attached to it.

The most intimate form of such meaningful exchange is mutual self-disclosure. Reciprocity in itself does not necessarily imply that any information of the self is disclosed; self-disclosure is personal, reciprocity need not be.

Self-disclosure does not always infer revealing intimate aspects of your life to other group members, although at times this does occur. To self-disclose means to take a risk...a risk that the feelings you reveal may not be accepted, or worse yet, that you may be rejected as a person because of them. However, before an individual reveals information about himself, he usually trusts that the individual(s) to whom he is disclosing will listen and try to understand what he is attempting to communicate to them about. You cannot discuss mere facts with others and expect to get to know them as human beings. Feelings and emotions are the foundation upon which we assign personal meaning to our relationships, and our way of defining what other people are all about. Each viewpoint expressed stimulates thought in the mind of another, creating a cyclical process en route to better understanding and knowing of one's self through others, and others through one's self.

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Self-Disclosure can be rewarding to both parties involved. It allows the discloser the opportunity to let his feelings be known, enabling others to learn of him as a person. It is a way of saying, "I trust you enough to tell you this," which can in many ways be very self-fulfilling. He can render his problems and/or himself to be considered by other people, hoping to receive constructive feedback in return. This can lead to increasingly higher states of self-actualization, promoting more communicative efficiency in different group contexts.

Relationships within small groups cannot remain static; if they did, they would no longer be considered relationships. It is as a result of self-disclosure processes that individuals change and enhance their life styles, providing others with the opportunity to do the same.

Suggestions for Further Research

The following represent a list of plausible hypotheses, as related to the rationale provided throughout this paper. As noted earlier, to date little if any research has been conducted on the effect of self-actualizing people within small group contexts. It is an area which can be highly abstract in nature, yet it provides valuable implications too numerous to be overlooked. To eliminate such abstractions, research must be conducted in a manner which not only produces empirical data, but uses such information to create new hypotheses to be tested.

For measurement of self-actualization, refer to Shostrom's (1966) Personal Orientation Inventory (POI).

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I. The Self-Actualizing Group Member

Hypothesis 1: As a group member, the self-actualizer has a greater ability to accurately assess and perceive the behavioral characteristics of other group members.

Hypothesis 2: Any person who is found to be a highly self-actualized individual, will have a greater capacity for relating to different kinds of people in different contexts, as compared to those who are found to be less self-actualized.

Hypothesis 3: In small group settings, self-actualizing people more readily adjust their behaviors to the behaviors of others, and the situation at hand, for the sake of more effective communication and group performance.

Hypothesis 4: The self-actualizer has a wider, more peripheral perceptual field than does a non-self-actualizing person.

Hypothesis 5: The higher the level of self-actualization attained by an individual, the more roles will he be able to effectively assume within a small group setting.

Hypothesis 6: The self-actualizing group member construes more personal meaning to group functionings.

Hypothesis 7: The self-actualizer feels a greater need to set and attain more goals in a shorter amount of time, and is more concerned with group satisfaction than individual satisfaction in so doing.

Hypothesis 8: The self-actualizer feels a greater need to fulfill roles in social, rather than academic or business-oriented settings.

Hypothesis 9: The self-actualizer is less likely to conform to those norms and expectations set by others in the groups in which he is a member.

Hypothesis 10: Assumed leadership roles are directly correlated with high levels of self-actualization in small group settings.

II. Interaction and Group Environment

Hypothesis 1: The self-actualizing individual experiences less threat when confronted with initial and ongoing dyadic and small group contexts.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the level of self-actualization a person is found to have, the fewer defensive behaviors will he engage in when interacting with others.

Hypothesis 3: The most self-actualized group member will be perceived as being the most trusted group member.

Hypothesis 4: High self-actualizers are better listeners than low self-actualizers.

Hypothesis 5: The higher the level of self-actualization, the greater the potential for intimate relations with others.

Hypothesis 6: The self-actualizer utilizes more information when solving problems and making decisions in small group contexts.

Hypothesis 7: The self-actualizing group member is more likely to minimize the attitudes displayed by others, whereas the group member who is less actualizing is more likely to exaggerate those attitudes he perceives others to elicit when interacting within small groups.

III. Reciprocal Exchange and Mutual Self-Disclosure: Two Behavioral Determinants Within Small Groups

Hypothesis 1: Self-actualizing individuals feel a greater need to

reciprocate, but experience fewer reciprocal tensions as a small group member.

Hypothesis 2: Self-actualizing individuals more frequently disclose information of themselves, and disclose information which is more intimate in nature than other group members.

Hypothesis 3: Self-actualizing group members are more likely to overdisclose information of themselves, threatening other group members in so doing.

Hypothesis 4: Self-actualizers are more responsive in reciprocating disclosure levels in small group contexts.

Hypothesis 5: Self-actualizers are most likely to assume risks while interacting in small group settings.

Hypothesis 6: The self-actualizing group member more frequently gives constructive feedback to the responses and behaviors of other members of the group.

Summary

It is rare that a person would not want to know himself, know others and have others know him in return. The small group arena provides opportunities for such experiences to occur. However, if members of such groups do not place value on the importance of positive interaction, of personalizing group environments, such learnings cannot take place.

Self-actualization is a human drive to enhance these learnings for one's own benefit, as well as for those whom he communicates to and creates relationships with. To actualize his potentials by constantly utilizing the resources he creates for himself to the

fullest extent, he must employ supportive rather than defensive behaviors on a daily basis. It is also important that he be open to changes and adjustments that will benefit his ability to relate to himself and others...often within small groups of people. Perceiving proper communicative behaviors, and applying them to his actions, will prepare him for helping others to do the same.

Given the context and the people within it, there is often a need to return others' gestures and to let our thoughts and feelings be known. The need for reciprocity in some form is basic, even more so than the need for personal self-disclosure. Both affect and are affected by behavioral actions and reactions while relating on a small group level.

The distinction between mere reciprocal exchange and mutual self-disclosure is a needed one. The awareness of each, the amount of importance placed upon interpersonal skills, and the ability to utilize these values will, to a great extent, determine how one manages different kinds of reciprocal tensions. This will further allow an individual the opportunity to more frequently engage in intimate interactions with others, en route to creating more effective group atmospheres which promote healthy and lasting relationships with those who reciprocate one's intentions.

Roles, identities and values are ever changing due to the concepts of self-actualization, supportiveness and interpersonal trust as they play major roles in small group, as well as other contextual settings. They should be set as goals to be attained by those who strive on efficiency, warmth and a feeling of wanting rather than having to belong to groups.

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